

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02

TRSE-00 /045 W

-----017940 271951Z /43

R 271836Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8914

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 6027

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CEMENT WORKERS STRIKE SETTLED

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 5992, (B) TEGUCIGALPA A-58

1. AFTER A MARATHON NEGOTIATING SESSION THAT LASTED ALMOST THREE DAYS AND ENDED AT 6 A.M. ON DECEMBER 24 THE CEMENT WORKERS UNION AND THE COMPANY REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON THE ISSUE BETWEEN THEM (REFTEL). THE UNION SETTLED FOR ABOUT \$250,000 OF THE \$425,000 BACK PAY IT CLAIMED WAS OWED TO THE WORKERS AND THE COMPANY'S AGREEMENT THAT IN THE FUTURE IT WOULD COMPLY WITH THE UNION'S INTERPRETATION OF THE PAYMENT CLAUSE THAT HAD BEEN IN DISPUTE.

2. THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH THE POTENTIAL STRIKE WAS VIEWED WAS UNDERLINED WHEN CHIEF OF STATE GENERAL MELGAR SENT HIS PERSONAL ADVISOR, THE INFLUENTIAL CESAR BATRES, TO SIT IN ON THE NEGOTIATIONS, REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT INTEREST THAT A SOLUTION BE FOUND. ON THE UNION SIDE, THE CEMENT WORKERS AUTHORIZED CELEO GONZALEZ, HEAD OF THE NORTH COAST LABOR FEDERATION (FESITRANH) TO NEGOTIATE ON THE UNION'S BEHALF. HE WAS ASSISTED BY FORMER LABOR MINISTER GAUTAMA FONSECA.

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THE INCUMBENT LABOR MINISTER, ADALBERTO DISCUA, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN ACTIVE IN ATTEMPTS AT REACHING A SOLUTION, WAS NOT PRESENT AT THE FINAL NEGOTIATIONS.

3. COMMENT: WHILE THE UNION MADE SOME MINOR CONCESSIONS, IT APPEARS TO HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY WON ITS ARGUMENT. AS IN A PREVIOUS POTENTIAL STRIKE, AT THE

SULA MILK PRODUCTS PLANT, CELEO GONZALEZ FELT STRONGLY THAT AN IMPORTANT ISSUE WAS AT STAKE AND WAS APPARENTLY WILLING TO FACE WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE HONDURAN LABOR MOVEMENT. IN THE SULA MILK PRODUCTS CONFRONTATION, THE COMPANY HAD ILLEGALLY FIRED THE NION LEADERSHIP. HONDURAN LAW PROHIBITS FIRING UNION OFFICERS WITHOUT STRONG CAUSE. THE FESITRANH SUCCESSFULLY INSISTED ON THEIR REINSTATEMENT AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE COMMUNISTS. THE CEMENT COMPANY DISPUTE WAS BASED ON A CONTRACTUAL CLAUSE THAT THE UNION CLAIMED WAS BEING IGNORED. IN BOTH CASES, CELEO GONZALEZ TOLD EMBOFFS THAT HE FELT SERIOUS ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE FOR THE UNION MOVEMENT WERE INVOLVED. IN BOTH CASES THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WON BECAUSE IT WAS UNITED ON THE ISSUE AND, APPARENTLY BECAUSE IT WAS RIFHT, HAD THE TACIT SUPPORT OF THE GOH. THE UNIQUE POSITION OF CELEO GONZALEZ AS THE COUNTRY'S UNDISPUTED LABOR LEADER WAS AGAIN EMPHASIZED. JARAMILLO

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CEMENT, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 27-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TEGUCI06027
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770482-0471
Format: TEL
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771215/aaaaalrr.tel
Line Count: 82
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 560c5efc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 TEGUCIGALPA 5992, 78 TEGUCIGALPA A-58
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 125417
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CEMENT WORKERS STRIKE SETTLED
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, HO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/560c5efc-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009